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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000184

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FOR GUINEA TASK FORCE, AF/W, AF/EX, CA/OCS, DS/IP/AF
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SUBJECT: TFGV01: SITREP 43: GUINEA UNREST, FEB. 16, 2007,
1200 GMT

REF: CONAKRY 183 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: POLOFF JESSICA DAVIS BA, REASON 1.4 (b,d)

Situation on the Ground

¶1. (SBU) At present, Conakry is quiet. There was increased pedestrian traffic this morning, despite its being during curfew hours. There is no vehicular traffic. As in past days, women are at stands selling small items but the shops and stores remain closed. Over the last 24 hours, the security environment is more calm than it has been in previous days.

¶2. (SBU) There is a marked decrease in the presence of security forces, though the military continues patrols in certain areas. There are also more checkpoints than previously, especially last night. Military officers continue to man a checkpoint at Castro bridge, the chokepoint into downtown. As we observed the afternoon of February 15, the military routinely searches vehicles and questions passengers, but they let most through to Kaloum. The military allows diplomatic vehicles to pass without checking them.

¶3. (C) On February 15, between the hours of 1800 and 1900, when the curfew began and for several hours thereafter, military patrols went through various neighborhoods shooting in the air in an attempt to force people into their houses. There is less gunfire reported from all areas of the capital, but it remains sporadic. We were told that to maintain order, senior officers have instructed the soldiers to return to beatings with their belts, instead of shooting their weapons.

¶4. (SBU) On this morning's national radio broadcast, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces General Kerfalla Camara thanked the population for the return to quiet on the fourth day of Guinea's state of siege. Camara stated that the military continues to fulfill its duty to reestablish public order and provide a secure environment. The General regretted the behavior of certain officers who fired on people against orders. Camara asked that all citizens who possess arms obtained during the looting of gendarme and police stations immediately return the weapons, or face justice, arguing that in this way, they will pay homage to the victims of the strike-related violence. On the same broadcast, a military spokesman claimed that "bandits dressed as military officers" committed criminal and violent acts. The spokesperson asserted that the population is "rejoicing in the military

intervention" that has restored calm to their neighborhoods.

¶5. (SBU) On February 15, Prime Minister Eugene Camara met with Conakry's mayors, counselors, and neighborhood administrators. He told them that the reason for the state of siege is the insecurity in their locales, and called on them to urge advocate behavior change by local residents. Camara focused on the vandalizing of police stations and said it is civic leaders' responsibility to identify the "bandits" who have weapons and work with security forces to bring them to justice.

¶6. (SBU) The airport remains open with multiple international flights approved by General Kerfalla. The port remains nominally open, with limited staffing.

¶7. (SBU) With some exceptions, the situation in the interior has also calmed in some areas. In Labe, Kankan, and N'Zerekore, three of Guinea's regional centers, the security environment is quiet with significantly reduced gunfire. In all of these cities, the military is fulfilling a police role as all civilian administrators and officers have fled or are otherwise hiding. We understand, however, that Pita remains volatile; military forces refused to escort a group of French in that direction due to concerns over sparking protest locally.

¶8. (SBU) The status of Guinea's borders remains dynamic. The President of the transporters union in N'Zerekore reports that no goods are going across the border there, but we understand that on the Sierra Leonian border that is cross-border traffic on a local level.

¶9. (C) Our contact in Macenta told us the military arrested
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thirty heavily armed men who they suspect are ex-combatants affiliated with ULIMO. These men remain in military custody. In the diamond mining town of Banankoro in Upper Guinea, protests on February 15 turned violent when demonstrators clashed with military officers. Unconfirmed reports are that one person was killed and two persons severely injured.

Political Update

10 (C) Ambassador is meeting this morning with National Assembly President Sompore, Supreme Court President Sidime and Economic and Social Council President Kamano.

¶11. (SBU) The presidents of Guinea's National Assembly, Supreme Court and Economic and Social Council met February 15 with unions, Patronat, and religious leaders. Serah Rabiattou Diallo, CNTG General Secretary, attended while Ibrahim Fofana, USTG General Secretary, did not, although he was represented. Fofana said that his absence was not a reflection of the strength of the union coalition, but rather a sense of insecurity. Union leaders in the interior told us they are adamantly opposed to the union leaders beginning any negotiations until Conte lifts the state of siege.

¶12. (SBU) Mamadou Mansare, Executive Secretary of CNTG, told us the unions received instructions from the International Labor Organization to attend the meeting and to proceed with dialogue. He said that it was at the urging of the embassy and the international institutions that they went. However, he reported little substance in the discussions, calling it a renewal of contact. Rabiattou Diallo requested that the government lift the state of siege and the military return to their barracks. Only then, she said, could real negotiations begin. The unions were asked to return February 17 at 0900; the military will provide badges to enable them to travel during the curfew period.

¶13. (SBU) On national radio, Michel Kamano, President of the

Economic and Social Council, lauded the gathering as a "new, positive step toward calm and peace and the reconstruction of our state." He said that it is important for negotiations to re-start so that Guinea does not fall into the same pattern of conflict as its neighbors and other countries with significant mineral wealth. Kamano and the presidents of the National Assembly and Supreme Court plan to meet with political party leaders and civil society representatives on February 16.

¶14. (C) Police did not arrest Fode Bangoura, former Minister of Presidential Affairs, as reported today on some websites. Bangoura told one of our interlocutors that on February 15 he responded to a summons from the gendarme headquarters. Officers questioned Bangoura and gendarmes took the former minister back to his residence and searched the house and property for the rest of the afternoon. Bangoura said he did not know what they were looking for, but claimed they did not find anything. He was asked to return to the gendarme station the morning of February 16 for additional questioning.

Mission Operations

¶15. (SBU) All American staff are at work and the Mission is operational, albeit with limited staff. We have brought in selected locally-engaged staff using Mission vehicles to perform essential functions.

¶16. (C) EAC met at 1130 to review developments.
MCDONALD